

LFV SFAC Fraser Mouth - SRKW

After significant consultation with the Vancouver public, the overwhelming consensus for the Mouth of the Fraser River is for Option 1, status quo. This option will provide significant protection for SRKW when they are present and still allow an important public fishery.

Option 2 or 3 would be devastating to the public on several levels and are not acceptable for reasons that will be listed in detail.

Currently there is a long-standing closure for salmon fishing in Areas 29-6, 29-7, 29-9, 29-11, and 29-12. If SRKW are present, these significant closures are more than adequate to protect their migration in and out of the area and any foraging that may occur.

The local experts, such as the Vancouver Sport Fishing Guides Association (among others) with multiple members having 40 year of fishing experience in this area or more, have spoken in the public process.

These local experts with thousands of hours in this area will tell you the SRKW are not off the Fraser mouth consistently. It is not a staging area. When they do arrive, they are generally moving from S to N in the currently closed areas mentioned above, at a high rate of speed in a consistent direction. Active foraging is rarely observed, and if done, is within the closed areas. The SRKW are usually out of the area entirely within a matter of a few hours, not days or weeks.

Furthermore, there is currently a no fishing for chinook regulation in place in the surrounding Vancouver waters from April 1st to Aug 31st. This adds an additional layer of protection to any SRKW in the area either for migration or foraging purposes.

The aforementioned chinook closure has had devastating social and economic impacts on the people of Vancouver and surrounding areas. The only remaining chinook opportunity is now in the first 2-3 weeks of September when there are fall chinook present off the North Arm and South Arm of the Fraser River. These are predominantly Vedder/Chilliwack chinook of hatchery origin where recent hatchery releases have increased from 1,000,000 to 2,000,000. This is a very modest opportunity in comparison to the previous August fishery of more abundant Thompson 4.1 chinook. Note by September the vast majority of Fraser chinook have already gone up the river with peak migration of chinook into the Fraser occurring on August 21st.

All the Vancouver public has left is the 2-3 week window (Sep 1 to Sep 21) to harvest some fall chinook. Sometimes this opportunity is cut very short with any significant precipitation. These fall chinook are lower river spawners and do not spend much time off the river mouth. When it rains they are gone, effectively ending that years marine opportunity.

Weather is also a consideration. The mouth of the Fraser River is an open water fishery that is subject to significant SE or NW winds that often render the area unsafe to navigate or simply too windy and rough to effectively fish for salmon.

As a result, the rain, wind, or both will often limit the number of days the public will attempt to fish off the mouth of the Fraser for chinook September 1-21. After September 21 the fishing is usually very slow and public participation drops off dramatically. The actual number of days the public is present off the mouth of the Fraser fishing for chinook in September is therefore quite limited. Certainly not 21 days. The reality is approximately 50% of those days are fishable. Many years the effort drops off prior to September 21 because of major precipitation events.

The end result is the actual potential interaction days with SRKW and public fishers is extremely low. The public is just not there on enough days. To compound this, the SRKW are also not there very often. How many days are the SRKW observed from September 1 to September 21 off the mouth of the Fraser? 0, 1, 2 days in those 3 weeks? Combine that with the actual days anglers are present and there are potentially seasons where the interaction with SRKW is 0.

As such, further non-surgical, broad based areas closures cannot be accepted or endorsed by the public or the LFV-SFAC. They are not necessary in this situation and will cause significant social and economic impact to an area that has already been hit very hard by large scale closures.

In addition to the measures in Option 1, and as an alternative to those seeking Options 2 and 3, we suggest adaptive measures. As you can see the actual number of interaction days in September is going to be very low. When they have the potential to occur, there can be measures put in place to further reduce interaction potential, such as VHF broadcasts so anglers or boaters so they can move until the SRKW have passed through. The solutions exist and have been used in other areas. Lack of manpower and funding are not acceptable excuses and not a reason to use large broad-based closures that might have maximum political impact on a press release but very little actual impact for the SRKW.

We also suggest education. The current SRKW avoidance guidelines have not been in place for very long and further education would benefit all boaters, fisher or non-fisher. We believe these guidelines in addition to the existing no fishing for salmon and no fishing for chinook closures provide more than ample protection for SRKW presence of the mouth of the Fraser.

Speaking to public boating safety, we also believe that Option 2 or 3 will create unnecessary public risk, as you will have the public boaters further offshore where there is significant commercial traffic.

Option 2 and 3 would also have a significant impact on the publics ability to fish for sockeye or pinks on years of abundance, noting that 2022 has a high probability of being one of those years for sockeye. It will also push these fishers into areas where there will be significant commercial traffic.

Also note Option 2 or 3 are stated as adding protection for SRKW when foraging increasingly on chum in the fall. The public does not fish for chum in the fall off the mouth of the Fraser. It is not a fishery and never has been. Peak chum migration into the Fraser occurs in the third week of October and there are no boats fishing off the mouth of the Fraser at that time. If SRKW are present in October to forage for chum, there will be no boats there. Chum are not present off the Fraser in the first 3 weeks of September when some boats are present, fishing for chinook.

Therefore, no further closures are needed as there are literally no public fishers present when the chum are present.

There are also no public boaters or tourist boaters present when the chum are present. The boating season is over, and the tourist season is over. Previously mentioned NW and SE winds are also very strong in the fall, further increasing the likely hood of no boats being in the area.

Furthermore, there is significant commercial activity in and around the North Arm and South Arm of the Fraser such as commercial crabbing, tugs and barges, tankers, freighters, car carriers, large vessel marine traffic, commercial sight-seeing boats, larger commercial commuter vessels, and the Fraser dredge. All of these activities are immensely louder than boats that are fishing where the emphasis is on being quiet while trolling with efficient and quiet 4-storke engines at low rpm. Our sonar units are also lower wattage than commercial applications.

Why are we looking at shutting down an important but brief fishery that has little or no impact on SRKW migration or foraging when these activities are slated to continue? In particular, the commercial crab boats are of concern. These are large, noisy vessels that operate up on the closed areas to public salmon fishing and set long lines of traps with ropes where the SRKW are transiting or potentially foraging. Is this fishery going to be shut down for the commercial or First Nation operators that are present in this area all summer long and have maximum interaction potential with SRKW on a prolonged and daily basis?

Is the dredge that goes right off the South Arm mouth of the Fraser where the heat map shows peak SRKW occurrence and dumps thousands of liters of turbid water while creating a significant amount of noise going to be shut down as well?

If Option 2 or 3 are accepted, then we would expect the answer to these questions to be yes.

If Option 2 or 3 are accepted, it would also trigger the responsibility of the government to provide financial assistance to the public fishing businesses affected by this closure as per the SARA document.

Option 1 is the only option that has balance. It will protect SRKW and take into consideration the social and economic needs of the public. We strongly advise that this is your choice for the mouth of the Fraser River.

Jason Tonelli

Lower Fraser Valley Sport Fish Advisory Committee (Area 28/29)- Chair